

She inspires companies to become lean, green



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by **Joni Astrup**

Associate editor

Judy Wlodarczyk once saw a company save \$19,680 a year just by making one change.

The company had been spending \$18,000 a year on biodegradable packing peanuts, plus \$3,360 a year on two containers for recycling cardboard.

The solution? Buy a cardboard shredder for \$6,800. The company then wrapped its product in the shredded cardboard, which eliminated the need for peanuts and for one of the recycling containers, saving \$19,680 a year.

Wlodarczyk, a national green manufacturing expert, shared that case study and others during a business seminar at Elk River City Hall. The event was sponsored by Enterprise Minnesota and attended by more than 70 local business executives.



Wlodarczyk is director of environment and energy services at CONNSTEP Inc., a Connecticut organization which helps manufacturers apply modern manufacturing and management methodologies to become more competitive.

Her topic in Elk River was “Lean and Green — Pathway to Sustainability.”

She said there are many shades of green.

One of the first steps is energy conservation, then waste reduction, efficient resource use, environmentally sound products and practices, renewable energy, sustainable buildings, and green as a growth strategy.

“We want to eventually get (to a point) where this is a pathway to sustainability, and we use green as a way to grow our business,” she said.

She cited a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency definition of sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.”

She also told some companies’ success stories.

One was Clorox — best known for bleach — launched a line of green cleaning products and grew its business in the process.

Hewlett Packard saved money and became more “green” by reducing packaging at the request of Walmart, which sells HP computers. HP began packing its notebook computers in recycled fabric carrying bags, three computers to a box. That reduced packaging by 97 percent.

She also told of one company that makes fasteners for the auto industry. It packages them in plastic bags inside boxes, which are then put on pallets, shrink wrapped and secured with metal bands.

The same company has another customer that uses returnable totes. The company fills the totes with product and ships it to its customer via UPS. When the totes are empty, the customer sends them back via UPS.

"It makes so much sense," Wlodarczyk said.

About Enterprise Minnesota

With the state's small manufacturers increasingly implementing lean — reducing waste and inefficiency — more are now also exploring "going green," according to Enterprise Minnesota.

To help those companies, Enterprise Minnesota hosted "The Next Generation of Lean" event in Elk River.

Other speakers at the seminar were Mankato-based Dotson Iron Castings Vice President Jed Falgren, and Brooklyn Park-based Central Container Corp.'s Lean Enterprise Manager Ed Polin.

Enterprise Minnesota is a non-profit consulting organization that helps Minnesota manufacturing enterprises grow profitably. It was chartered by the Minnesota Legislature in 1987.

For more information, go to www.enterprise-minnesota.org.

Benefits of being lean and green

Lean manufacturing eliminates ...

- Defects

- Overproduction

- Waiting

- Non-utilized resources

- Transportation

- Inventory
- Motion

- Extra processing

“Green” manufacturing adds ...

- Full use of raw material
- Energy efficiency
- Water conservation
- Eliminating toxic material
- Reduction of packaging wastes, emissions to air and water, solid and hazardous wastes, regulatory obligation and risks.

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